

## PSALM 22 – The Sufferings of the Messiah (part 1)

**INTRODUCTION** – Psalm 22 is known as a Messianic psalm. This psalm was definitely written by King David as defined by the superscription of the psalm: "To the chief musician upon Aijeleth Shahar, A Psalm of David". No one can determine definitively what "Aijeleth Shahar" means. On their own, "Aijeleth" comes from a root word for "female doe" and "shahar" means "early" or "morning." However, combined together it is said that the two words refer to a musical instrument used by the women in mourning. Psalm 22 is definitely a psalm of distress which includes mourning. David wrote this psalm when he went through severe trials. There were only two severe trials in his life. The first was before he became king, when King Saul hunted him like an animal. David had to leave his family and parents and flee to Philistine territory to find safety. The second trial was when he became king and his own son, Absalom, tried to kill him and to take over his kingdom. Both of David's enemies failed in their attempts to kill him and take away his kingdom. But the period of David's escape and flight was very difficult to bear to say the least. He leaned on the LORD to protect and deliver him from the long arm of his enemies.

A Messianic psalm is not like normal Bible prophecies found in narrative books of the Bible such as Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, Acts and including the Gospels. Prophecies are future events given by God to His people at a particular point in time and are fulfilled in the future. There is no fulfilment at the time when a prophecy was given. For example, in Isaiah 7:14 when the LORD prophesied that the Messiah would be born of the virgin and would be called Emmanuel, there was no one born of a virgin in Isaiah's time until the time of Christ's birth (cf Matthew 1:22-23). Messianic psalms are more like typologies whereby events were described as they occurred at their respective points of time but with a future fulfilment not known to the people at that time. For example, when Jonah was in the belly of the great fish where he learned his lesson that "salvation is of the LORD", he did not know that the time he spent in the belly of the fish was a type of Christ. Years later, Christ told His disciples that just as Jonah spent three days and nights in the belly of the big fish, He would spend three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12:40).

Messianic psalms are prayers in song based upon the psalmists' experiences as they went through life's struggles. Did they know that even as they were describing their own heartfelt feelings and emotions, they were also describing Christ's sufferings and other aspects of His ministry on earth? This is a difficult question to answer dogmatically. Personally, my answer is no. The reason is that the context of these psalms does not demonstrate this knowledge, just like the contexts of the many typologies found in the Old Testament do not demonstrate that they knew.

**Verse 1 (cf Matthew 27:46)** – David began his cry with "My God, my God. Why hast thou forsaken me?" David cried to the LORD feeling that the LORD had forsaken him. The word "forsaken" means "to relinquish" or "to leave off". David's trials were so great that he felt as

if the LORD had left him to fend for himself the sufferings and difficulties of life. This is seen by his use of synonymous parallelism to express his feelings before God. He said, "Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?" David knew that the LORD had seen his plight and sufferings but there was no relief from all his trials. David also roared, i.e. moaned, as he experienced his trials but the relief did not come.

When the LORD cried on the cross, "My God, My God why hast Thou forsaken me?", the cry is similar to Psalm 22:1. God never forsakes His own. He does not leave them to fend for themselves. He did not forsake David and neither did He forsake Christ. In David's case, God wanted him to learn precious lessons. If David wrote this psalm during the time of King Saul, then it was to teach David the importance of prayer and trust in the LORD at all times. David was closest to the LORD in terms of praying without ceasing during those years with Saul. If the psalm was written during Absalom's rebellion, then David had to experience the just punishment of God upon him for his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba. In the case of Christ, the Heavenly Father did not as it were go to the aid of His only begotten Son because Christ had to die on the cross for our sins! Therefore he allowed sinful men to persecute, humiliate and even to crucify Christ. God who had all the power at His disposal did not lift a finger to help His Son for our sakes! That was why the LORD cried, "My God, My God why has Thou forsaken me?"

**Verse 2** – David continued to cry to God. David's close relationship with God is seen in his usage of the first person singular pronoun "my." He used it again in verse 2. He declared that he cried in the day time but the LORD did not hear. This means that no help came to relieve David of his sufferings. Daytime crying is not a good sign, for crying is normally done at night when there is no work to be done and everyone is sleeping. But to cry in the day implies that work could not be done because the grief was too great. David cried day and night which reveals the depth and intensity of David's sufferings. He could not breathe as his enemies were relentless in their pursuit and desire to capture and to kill him.

**Verse 3** – Regardless of the "delay" in help, David did not cease to proclaim the holiness of the LORD. The adversative "but" was used to contrast David's feelings and his faith. He did not allow his emotions to jeopardize his faith and trust in the LORD. His emphasis on the holiness of the LORD means that he knew the LORD did not do wrong. David might have felt that the LORD had forsaken him but by faith he was certain that the LORD would not forsake him. The covenantal relationship always ensures protection and assurance of help in time of need. This was true in David's time and it is true today. The phrase, "O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel" means that the LORD had not deserted Israel but that he counted Israel His nation and His presence remains with Israel even as she sang praises to Him. Synthetic parallelism is evident in verse 3 which is also an antithetical parallelism from verse 2. David understood that his faith was not based upon experiences but on God's Truth which is His holy and perfect Word.

**Verse 4** – This verse emphasizes the faithfulness of the LORD. David says that his fathers trusted in the LORD and the LORD delivered them. The use of "fathers" means that David was not referring to his earthly fathers but more so to the patriarchs and other Old Testament saints before him. David was referring to the Old Testament Scriptures as the basis for his faith and trust in the LORD because only through the Scriptures could he know the testimony of his fathers. He knew that the LORD's deliverance would come in time. The word "delivers" means "to bring into safety and security". The emphasis is on the safety. He expressed the torments in his heart unto the LORD like a young child to his father! This is how prayer is meant to be. This describes his intimate relationship with the LORD whereby he pours his heart out with no restraint. Synthetic parallelism is used in this verse.

**Verse 5** – Continuing on what he said about his fathers in the Old Testament, David said that they cried, i.e. called for help unto the LORD. David was following in the footsteps of his forefathers. Eventually, the forefathers were delivered by the LORD. The word "deliver" here is different from the word used in verse 4. The word "delivers" here means "to slip away". The emphasis is on the act of escaping danger or dangerous men, whereas the word in verse 4 emphasizes the safety after escaping. They trusted in the LORD and were not confounded or ashamed. Their faith and trust in the LORD were not in vain. They persevered to the end during their trials until the LORD delivered them. David read about these deliverances of the LORD in the lives of the forefathers and he was confident that the LORD would do the same for him in his life. Just as they cried to the LORD, David also cried to the LORD and opened his heart to Him knowing that the LORD would deliver in His time just. Synthetic parallelism was used here to add to the thought stated in the first line.

**Verse 6** – Using the adversative "but", David contrasted what happened to the forefathers and to himself. He did not want to be presumptuous when it comes to the things of God. He acknowledged that he was a worm, i.e. he was nobody and not a man. To be considered a man meant that he was dignified and had all the rights that a man was accorded. But when David came before the LORD, he had no rights. He was a worm! A worm crawls on the ground and is fodder for fish. It is despised and stomped upon under the foot of man. It is literally beneath all the creatures that God has created, for it lives in the earth. David saw himself as a reproach of men, i.e. a disgrace before man. He was also despised by people. These are the characteristics of a worm! This was how David felt and before God he acknowledged that he deserved the sufferings that he received from his enemies. As sinners, even sinners saved by grace, the hardness of life is something that we deserve because we have sinned and continue to sin. Though it is true that David's sufferings were not due to any specific sins that he had committed but that does not mean that he did not deserve the sufferings! Based upon the sovereignty of God, it is allowed by God and therefore man deserves the sufferings for whatever reasons the LORD deems suitable. Ultimately it is for the strengthening of the faith of the believer and his trust in the LORD is

deepened in the process. He will be able to say from his heart that he can trust God in times of plenty as well as in times of adversity.

**Verse 7-8** – David was mocked by others who witnessed his plight. No one came to his aid; instead, they mocked him. He was all alone. Those who could help, like Jonathan, could not help much because David's enemy was King Saul, Jonathan's father. In the days of Absalom, there was Shimei who shouted at him and said that David deserved his sufferings because he was a bloody man! The people shot out the lip which probably means they stuck out their tongues at him as they mocked him. They shook their heads as they said, "He trusted on the LORD *that* he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him." David refused to lift a finger against King Saul; neither did he want his own son Absalom dead. He trusted in the LORD to deliver him in His time. The first "deliver" means "to bring to safety", whereas the second "deliver" means "to snatch away." The emphasis of the first is on the safety aspect, whereas the second is on the act of deliverance. "Since David delights in the LORD let the LORD deliver him!" was a taunt that was very hard to bear. The turmoil in his head and the doubt that arose were very real. Most of us may have been similarly assaulted by such painful remarks, the intent being to bring about faithlessness and unbelief, and to destroy faith and trust in the LORD. David felt it severely in his innermost being! If the taunts and mockeries come from friends and loved ones, they are even harder to bear!

[to be continued]